LONGINUS
On the Sublime

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INTRODUCTION

Cecilius's Treatise and Its Shortcomings

As you will remember, my dear Postumius Terentianus, when we were working together on Cecilius's little treatise on the sublime, it seemed to us too trivial a handling of the subject as a whole; it showed no grasp of the main points, and offered its readers little of the practical help that it should be the writer's main object to supply. In any systematic treatise two things are essential: first, there must be some definition of the subject; second in order of treatment, but of greater importance, there must be some indication of the methods by which we may ourselves reach the desired goal. Now Cecilius, assuming us to be ignorant, sets out to establish the nature of the sublime by means of innumerable examples; but he leaves out of account, apparently considering it unnecessary, the means by which we may be enabled to raise our faculties to the proper pitch of grandeur. However, we ought perhaps rather to praise him for the industry he has shown in carrying out his purpose than find fault with him for his deficiencies.

CHAPTER I

First Thoughts on Sublimity

SINCE you have urged me in my turn to write down my thoughts on the sublime for your gratification, we should consider whether my views contain anything of value to men in public life. And as your nature and your sense of fitness prompt you, my dear friend, you will help me to form the truest possible judgements on the various details; for it was a sound answer that was given by the man who, when asked what we have in common with the gods, replied, 'Benevolence and truth'.

As I am writing for you, Terentianus, who are a man of some erudition, I almost feel that I can dispense with a long preamble showing that sublimity consists in a certain excellence and distinction in expression, and that it is from this source alone that the greatest poets and historians have acquired their pre-eminence and won for themselves an eternity of fame. For the effect of elevated language is, not to persuade the hearers, but to entrance them; and at all times, and in every way, what transports us with wonder is more telling than what merely persuades or gratifies us. The extent to which we can be persuaded is usually under our own control, but these sublime passages exert an irresistible force and mastery, and get the upper hand with every hearer. Inventive skill and the proper order and disposition of material are not manifested in a good touch here and there, but reveal themselves by slow degrees as they run through the whole texture of the composition; on the other hand, a well-timed stroke of sublimity scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt, and in a flash reveals the full power of the speaker. But I should think, my dear Terentianus, that you could develop these points and others of the same kind from your own experience.

CHAPTER 2

Is there an Art of the Sublime?

BEFORE going any farther, I must take up the question whether there is such a thing as an art of sublimity or profundity, for some people think that those who relate matters of this kind to a set of artistic precepts are on a completely wrong track. Genius, they say, is innate; it is not something that can be learnt, and nature is the only art that begets it. Works of natural genius are spoilt, they believe, are indeed utterly debased, when they are reduced to the bare bones of rules and systems. However, I suggest that there is a case for the opposite point of view when it is considered that, although nature is in the main subject only to her own laws where sublime feelings are concerned, she is not given to acting at random and wholly without system. Nature is the first cause and the fundamental creative principle in all activities, but the function of a system is to prescribe the degree and the right moment for each, and to lay down the clearest rules for use and practice. Furthermore, sublime impulses are exposed to greater dangers when they are left to themselves without the ballast and stability of knowledge; they need the curb as often as the spur.

Speaking of the life of mankind as a whole, Demosthenes declares that the greatest of all blessings is good fortune, and that next to it comes good counsel, which, however, is no less important, since its absence leads to the complete destruction of what good fortune brings. Applying this to diction, we might say that nature fills the place of good fortune, and art that of good counsel. Most important, we must remember that the very fact that certain linguistic effects derive from nature alone cannot be learnt from any other source than art. If then the critic who censures those who want to learn this art would take these points into consideration, he would no longer, I imagine, regard the study of the topic I am treating as superfluous and unprofitable.

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CHAPTER 3

Defects that Militate against Sublimity

. . . Quell they the oven's far-flung splendour-glow!
Ha, let me but one hearth-abider mark –
One flame-wreath torrent-like I'll whirl on high;
I'll burn the roof, to cinders shrivel it! –
Nay, now my chant is not of noble strain.[1]

SUCH things as this are not tragic, but pseudo-tragic – the 'flame-wreaths', the 'vomiting forth to heaven', the representation of Boreas as a flute-player, and all the rest. They are turbid in expression, and the imagery is confused rather than suggestive of terror; each phrase, when examined in the light of day, sinks gradually from the terrible to the contemptible.

Now even in tragedy, which by its very nature is majestic and admits of some bombast, misplaced tumidity is unpardonable; still less, I think, would it be appropriate to factual narration. This is why people laugh at Gorgias of Leontini[2] when he writes of 'Xerxes the Zeus of the Persians', or of 'vultures, animated sepulchres'. Similarly certain expressions of Callisthenes[3] are ridiculed as being high-flown and not sublime; still more are some of Cleitarchus's[4] – a frivolous fellow who, in the words of Sophocles,[5] blows 'on wretched pipes without control of breath'. Such effects will be found also in Amphicrates and Hegesias and Matris,[6] for often when

1. I have adopted the translation provided by A. S. Way for Roberts's edition, since it brings out so well the bombastic, pseudo-tragic quality to which Longinus takes exception. The lines probably come from a lost *Orithyia* by Aeschylus.

2. A Sicilian rhetorician of the fifth century B.C.

3. A historian who wrote at the end of the fourth and beginning of the third centuries B.C.

4. Another historian, contemporary with Callisthenes; celebrated the deeds of Alexander the Great.

5. The words, probably from a lost *Orithyia* by Sophocles, are quoted in a fuller form by Cicero (*Ad Atticum*).

6. Amphicrates of Athens (*fl.* 90 B.C.), Hegesias of Magnesia (*fl.* 270 B.C.), and Matris of Thebes (*fl.* ? 200 B.C.) were rhetoricians.

they believe themselves to be inspired they are not really carried away, but are merely being puerile.

Tumidity seems, on the whole, to be one of the most difficult faults to guard against. For somehow or other, all those who aim at grandeur in the hope of escaping the charge of feebleness and aridity fall naturally into this very fault, putting their trust in the maxim that 'to fall short of a great aim is at any rate a noble failure'. As in the human body, so also in diction swellings are bad things, mere flabby insincerities that will probably produce an effect opposite to that intended; for as they say, there is nothing drier than a man with dropsy.

Tumidity, then, arises from the desire to outdo the sublime. Puerility, on the other hand, is the complete antithesis of grandeur, for it is entirely low and mean-spirited, and is indeed the most ignoble of faults. What then is puerility? Is it not, surely, a thought which is pedantically elaborated until it tails off into frigidity? Writers slip into this kind of fault when they strive for unusual and well-wrought effects, and above all for attractiveness, and instead flounder into tawdriness and affectation.

Related to this there is a third type of fault in impassioned writing which Theodorus[1] called *parenthyrsus*, or false sentiment. This is misplaced, hollow emotionalism where emotion is not called for, or immoderate passion where restraint is what is needed. For writers are often carried away, as though by drunkenness, into outbursts of emotion which are not relevant to the matter in hand, but are wholly personal, and hence tedious. To hearers unaffected by this emotionalism their work therefore seems atrocious, and naturally enough, for while they are themselves in an ecstasy, their hearers are not. However, I am leaving this matter of the emotions for treatment in another place.

1. Theodorus of Gadara, a rhetorician (*fl.* 30 B.C.).

CHAPTER 4

Frigidity

Of the second fault I mentioned, that is, frigidity, there are plenty of examples in Timaeus,[1] in other respects a writer of some ability, and not incapable of occasional grandeur – a man, indeed, of much learning and inventiveness. However, while he was very fond of criticizing the failings of others, he remained blind to his own, and his passion for continually embarking upon odd conceits often led him into the most trifling puerilities. I shall give you only one or two examples from this author, since Cecilius has anticipated me with most of them. In his eulogy of Alexander the Great he says of him that 'he gained possession of the whole of Asia in fewer years than Isocrates[2] took to write his *Panegyric* advocating war against the Persians.' How remarkable is this comparison of the great Macedonian with the rhetorician! For it is obvious, Timaeus, that, seen in this light, the Spartans were far inferior in prowess to Isocrates, since they took thirty years over the conquest of Messene, whereas he took no more than ten over the composition of his *Panegyric*. Then look at the way in which he speaks of the Athenians captured in Sicily: 'They had behaved sacrilegiously towards Hermes and mutilated statues of him, and it was for this reason that they were punished, very largely through the efforts of a single man, Hermocrates the son of Hermon, who on his father's side was descended from the outraged god.' I am surprised, my dear Terentianus, that he does not write of the tyrant Dionysius that, 'having been guilty of impious conduct towards Zeus and Heracles, he was therefore

1. Timaeus of Tauromenium (*fl.* 310 B.C.), a Sicilian historian who was so fond of finding faults in the work of other writers that he was nicknamed Epitimaeus. i.e., 'fault-finder'.

2. Isocrates (436–338 B.C.), the great Athenian orator and rhetorician. In his *Panegyric* (380 B.C.) he urged the Athenians and the Spartans to lay aside their rivalry and unite against Persia.

deprived of his sovereignty by Dion and Heracleides.'[1]

But why speak of Timaeus when even such demigods as Xenophon and Plato, trained as they were in the school of Socrates, forget themselves at times for the sake of such trivial effects? In his *Constitution of Sparta* Xenophon writes: 'In fact you would hear their voices less than those of marble statues, and would turn aside their gaze less easily than those of bronze figures; and you would think them more modest even than the maïdens in their eyes.'[2] It would have been more characteristic of Amphicrates[3] than Xenophon to speak of the pupils of our eyes as modest maidens. And good heavens, to ask us to believe that every single one of them had modest eyes, when it is said that the shamelessness of people is revealed in nothing so much as in their eyes! 'You drunken sot with the eyes of a dog,' as the saying goes.[4] However, Timaeus could not let Xenophon keep even this frigid conceit to himself, but laid his thieving hands on it. At all events, speaking of Agathocles, and how he abducted his cousin from the unveiling ceremony when she had been given in marriage to another man, he asks, 'Who would have done this if he had not had strumpets in his eyes instead of maidens?'

As for the otherwise divine Plato, he says, when he means merely wooden tablets, 'They will inscribe memorials of cypress-wood and place them in the temples;'[5] and again, 'With regard to walls, Megillus, I would agree with Sparta that the walls be allowed to remain lying asleep in the ground, and not rise again.'[6] And Herodotus's phrase for beautiful women, when he calls them 'tortures for the eyes',[7] is not much better. However, Herodotus can in some measure be defended, for it is barbarians who use this phrase in his book, and they in their cups. All the same, it is not proper to put low terms into the

1. The genitive of Zeus is Dios, and Longinus ironically bases on this a conceit in the manner of Timaeus's far-fetched pun on Hermes and Hermocrates the son of Hermon.

2. Because it reflects a tiny image of the person gazing into it, the pupil of the eye was called *korē*, or maiden.

3. An Athenian rhetorician at the beginning of the first century B.C.

4. *Iliad* I, 225.

5. *Laws* V, 741 C.

6. ibid. VI, 778 D.

7. Herodotus, V, 18.

mouths even of such people as these, and thereby lay oneself open to the censure of later ages.

CHAPTER 5

The Origins of Literary Impropriety

ALL these ignoble qualities in literature arise from one cause – from that passion for novel ideas which is the dominant craze among the writers of today; for our faults spring, for the most part, from very much the same sources as our virtues. Thus while a fine style, sublime conceptions, yes, and happy turns of phrase, too, all contribute towards effective composition, yet these very factors are the foundation and origin, not only of success, but also of its opposite. Something of the kind applies also to variations in manner, to hyperbole, and to the idiomatic plural, and I shall show later the dangers which these devices seem to involve. At the moment I must cast about and make some suggestions how we may avoid the defects that are so closely bound up with the achievement of the sublime.

CHAPTER 6

Criticism and the Sublime

THE way to do this, my friend, is first of all to get a clear understanding and appreciation of what constitutes the true sublime. This, however, is no easy undertaking, for the ability to judge literature is the crowning achievement of long experience. Nevertheless, if I am to speak by way of precept, we can perhaps learn discrimination in these matters from some such considerations as those which follow.

CHAPTER 7

The True Sublime

IT must be understood, my dear friend, that, as in everyday life nothing is great which it is considered great to despise, so is it with the sublime. Thus riches, honours, reputation, sovereignty, and all the other things which possess in marked degree the external trappings of a showy splendour, would not seem to a sensible man to be great blessings, since contempt for them is itself regarded as a considerable virtue; and indeed people admire those who possess them less than those who could have them but are high-minded enough to despise them. In the same way we must consider, with regard to the grand style in poetry and literature generally, whether certain passages do not simply give an impression of grandeur by means of much adornment indiscriminately applied, being shown up as mere bombast when these are stripped away – passages which it would be more noble to despise than to admire. For by some innate power the true sublime uplifts our souls; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy, just as though we had ourselves produced what we had heard.

If an intelligent and well-read man can hear a passage several times, and it does not either touch his spirit with a sense of grandeur or leave more food for reflection in his mind than the mere words convey, but with long and careful examination loses more and more of its effectiveness, then it cannot be an example of true sublimity – certainly not unless it can outlive a single hearing. For a piece is truly great only if it can stand up to repeated examination, and if it is difficult, or, rather, impossible to resist its appeal, and it remains firmly and ineffaceably in the memory. As a generalization, you may take it that sublimity in all its truth and beauty exists in such works as please all men at all times. For when men who differ in their pursuits, their ways of life, their ambitions, their ages, and their languages all think in one and the same way about the same works, then the unanimous judgement, as it were, of men who have so little in

common induces a strong and unshakeable faith in the object of admiration.

CHAPTER 8

Five Sources of Sublimity

IT may be said that there are five particularly fruitful sources of the grand style, and beneath these five there lies as a common foundation the command of language, without which nothing worth while can be done. The first and most important is the ability to form grand conceptions, as I have explained in my commentary on Xenophon. Second comes the stimulus of powerful and inspired emotion. These two elements of the sublime are very largely innate, while the remainder are the product of art – that is, the proper formation of the two types of figure, figures of thought and figures of speech, together with the creation of a noble diction, which in its turn may be resolved into the choice of words, the use of imagery, and the elaboration of the style. The fifth source of grandeur, which embraces all those I have already mentioned, is the total effect resulting from dignity and elevation.

We must consider, then, what is involved under each of these heads, with a preliminary reminder that Cecilius has left out of account some of the five divisions, one of them obviously being that which relates to emotion. Now if he thought that these two things, sublimity and emotion, were the same thing, and that they were essentially bound up with each other, he is mistaken. For some emotions can be found that are mean and not in the least sublime, such as pity, grief, and fear; and on the other hand many sublime passages convey no emotion, such as, among countless examples, the poet's daring lines about the Aloadae:

> Keenly they strove to set Ossa upon Olympus, and upon Ossa the forest-clad Pelion, that they might mount up to heaven;

and the still greater conception that follows:

> And this would they have accomplished.[1]

With the orators, again, their eulogies, ceremonial addresses,

1. *Odyssey* XI, 315–16; 317.

and occasional speeches contain touches of majesty and grandeur at every point, but as a rule lack emotion; thus emotional speakers are the least effective eulogists, while, on the other hand, those who excel as panegyrists avoid emotionalism. But if Cecilius believed that emotion contributes nothing at all to the sublime, and for this reason considered it not worth mentioning, once again he was making a very serious mistake; for I would confidently maintain that nothing contributes so decisively to the grand style as a noble emotion in the right setting, when it forces its way to the surface in a gust of frenzy, and breathes a kind of divine inspiration into the speaker's words.

CHAPTER 9

Nobility of Soul

Now since the first of these factors, that is to say, nobility of soul,[1] plays the most important part of them all, here too, even though it is a gift rather than an acquired characteristic, we should do all we can to train our minds towards the production of grand ideas, perpetually impregnating them, so to speak, with a noble inspiration. By what means, you will ask, is this to be done? Well, I have written elsewhere to this effect: 'Sublimity is the echo of a noble mind.' Thus, even without being spoken, a simple idea will sometimes of its own accord excite admiration by reason of the greatness of mind that it expresses; for example, the silence of Ajax in 'The Calling Up of the Spirits'[2] is grand, more sublime than any words.

First, then, it is absolutely necessary to indicate the source of this power, and to show that the truly eloquent man must have a mind that is not mean or ignoble. For it is not possible that those who throughout their lives have feeble and servile thoughts and aims should strike out anything that is remarkable, anything that is worthy of an immortality of fame; no,

1. The first of the five sources of sublimity, listed in the previous chapter as 'the ability to form grand conceptions'.
2. *Odyssey* XI, 543 ff.

greatness of speech is the province of those whose thoughts are deep, and stately expressions come naturally to the most high-minded of men. Alexander's reply to Parmenio when he said, 'I would have been content . . . '[1]

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. . . the distance from earth to heaven; and it might be said that this is the stature of Homer as much as of Strife.[2]

Quite different from this is Hesiod's description of Trouble – if indeed *The Shield* is to be ascribed to Hesiod:[3]

Rheum was running from her nostrils.

The image he has presented is not powerful, but offensive. But see how Homer exalts the heavenly powers:

And as far as a man can see with his eyes into the hazy distance as he sits upon a mountain-peak and gazes over the wine-dark sea, even so far is the leap of the loudly-neighing steeds of the gods.[4]

He measures their mighty leap in terms of cosmic distances. Might one not exclaim, from the supreme grandeur of this, that if the steeds of the gods make two leaps in succession they will no longer find room on the face of the earth? And vast also are the images he conjures up for the Battle of the Gods:

And round them rolled the trumpet-tones of the wide heavens and of Olympus. And down in the underworld Hades, monarch of the realm of the shades, leapt from his throne and cried aloud in dread, lest the earth-shaker Poseidon thereafter should cleave the earth apart, and reveal to the gaze of mortals and immortals

1. Arrian (II, 25, 2) records that Parmenio said to Alexander that, if he had been Alexander, he would have been content to end a war on the terms offered without wishing to go further, to which Alexander replied that, if he had been Parmenio, he would have done so.

2. Evidently Longinus has referred to Homer's description of Strife (*Iliad* IV, 442).

3. Hesiod, who belongs probably to the eighth century B.C., is best known for his *Works and Days*. *The Shield of Heracles*, on the authorship of which Longinus casts doubt, is probably the work of an imitator.

4. *Iliad* V, 770 ff.

alike those grim and festering abodes which the very gods look upon with abhorrence.[1]

You see, my friend, how the earth is split from its foundations upwards, how Tartarus itself is laid bare, how the whole universe is turned upside down and torn apart, and everything alike, heaven and hell, things mortal and immortal, shares in the conflict and peril of the combat.

And yet, awe-inspiring as these things are, from another aspect, if they are not taken as allegory, they are altogether ungodly, and do not preserve our sense of what is fitting. In his accounts of the wounds suffered by the gods, their quarrels, their vengeful actions, their tears, their imprisonment, and all their manifold passions, Homer seems to me to have done everything in his power to make gods of the men fighting at Troy, and men of the gods. But while for us mortals, if we are miserable, death is appointed as a refuge from our ills, Homer has given the gods immortality, not only in their nature, but also in their misfortunes.

But far superior to the passages on the Battle of the Gods are those which represent the divine nature as it really is, pure, majestic, and undefiled; for example, the lines on Poseidon, in a passage on which many others before me have commented:

> And the far-stretched mountains and woodlands, and the peaks, and the Trojan city and the ships of the Achaeans trembled beneath the immortal feet of Poseidon as he strode forth. And he went on to drive over the swelling waters, and from all round the monsters of the deep came from their hiding-places and gambolled about him, for they knew their lord. And in rapture the sea parted her waves, and onwards they flew.[2]

So too the lawgiver of the Jews, no ordinary person, having formed a high conception of the power of the Divine Being, gave expression to it when at the very beginning of his Laws he wrote: 'God said' – what? 'Let there be light, and there was light; let there be land, and there was land.'

I should not, I think, seem a bore, my friend, if I were to put before you still one more passage from Homer – one dealing

1. A conflation of *Iliad* XXI, 338 and XX, 61–5.
2. Another conflation: *Iliad* XIII, 18; XX, 60; XIII, 19; 27–9.

with human affairs – in order to show how he habitually associates himself with the sublimity of his heroic themes. All of a sudden the battle of the Greeks is plunged into the impenetrable darkness of night, and then Ajax, utterly at a loss what to do, cries out:

> Father Zeus, do but rescue the sons of Achaea from out of the gloom, give us fair weather, and grant that we may see with our eyes. So long as it be in the light of day, even destroy us.[1]

These are truly the feelings of an Ajax. He does not beg for life, for this plea would be too base for the hero: but since in the crippling darkness he can turn his valour to no noble purpose, he is annoyed that this prevents him from getting on with the fight, and prays for the immediate return of daylight, resolved at least to find a death worthy of his courage, even though Zeus should be fighting against him. Here indeed Homer breathes in the inspiration of the fray, and is affected by it just as if he himself

> is raging madly, like Ares the spear-hurler, or as when ruinous flames rage among the hills, in the thickets of a deep forest, and foam gathers about his lips.[2]

However, throughout the *Odyssey*, which for a number of reasons must be taken into consideration, Homer shows that when a great genius is falling into decline, it is a special mark of his old age that he should be fond of fables. For it is clear on many grounds that he produced this work as his second composition, besides the fact that throughout the *Odyssey* he introduces remnants of the experiences at Troy as episodes from the Trojan War. And indeed he there pays a debt of mourning and lamentation to his heroes as something long due to them. In fact the *Odyssey* is nothing more than an epilogue to the *Iliad*:

> There lies Ajax the great warrior, there Achilles, there too Patroclus, peer of the gods in counsel; and there too my own dear son.[3]

1. *Iliad* XVII, 645–7.
2. *Iliad* XV, 605–7.
3. *Odyssey* III, 109–11. Nestor is telling Telemachus about the siege of Troy.

It was, I suppose, for the same reason that, writing the *Iliad* in the prime of life, he filled the whole work with action and conflict, whereas the greater part of the *Odyssey* is narrative, as is characteristic of old age. Thus in the *Odyssey* Homer may be likened to the setting sun, whose grandeur remains without its intensity; for no longer there does he maintain the same pitch as in those lays of Troy. The sublime passages have not that consistency which nowhere lapses into mediocrity, nor is there the same closely-packed profusion of passions, nor the versatile and oratorical style studded with images drawn from real life. As though the ocean were withdrawing into itself and remaining quietly within its own bounds, from now on we see the ebbing of Homer's greatness as he wanders in the realms of the fabulous and the incredible. In saying this I have not forgotten the storms in the *Odyssey* and the episode of the Cyclops and other things of the kind. I am speaking indeed of old age, but after all it is the old age of a Homer. Nevertheless, in every one of these passages the fabulous predominates over the actual.

As I said, I have digressed in this way in order to show how very easily a great spirit in his decline may at times be misled into writing nonsense; examples are the episodes of the wine-skin,[1] of the men whom Circe fed like swine, and whom Zoilus[2] described as 'wailing piglets', of Zeus nurtured by the doves like a nestling, and of the man remaining without food on the wreck for ten days,[3] and the incredible story of the killing of the suitors. For how else are we to describe these things than as veritable dreams of Zeus?

There is another reason why these comments should be made on the *Odyssey*, and that is that you should understand how the decline of emotional powers in poets and prose-writers leads to the study of character. For of this kind are the facts, given from the point of view of character, of the way of life in Odysseus's household; they constitute what is in effect a comedy of character.

1. *Odyssey* X, 17. The wine-skin in which Aeolus enclosed for Odysseus the unfavourable winds, which were released by his followers.

2. A grammarian and critic of the fourth century B.C. who was nicknamed 'Homer's Scourge' for his carping criticism of Homer.

3. A reference to Odysseus's ten-day swim at the end of *Odyssey* XII.

CHAPTER 10

The Selection and Organization of Material

NEXT we must consider whether there is anything else that makes for sublimity of style. Now as we naturally associate with all things certain elements that are inherent in their substance, so it necessarily follows that we shall find one source of the sublime in the unerring choice of the most felicitous of these elements, and in the ability to relate them to one another in such a way as to make of them a single organism, so to speak. For one writer attracts the hearer by his choice of matter, another by the cumulative effect of the ideas he chooses. For example, Sappho in her poetry always chooses the emotions attendant on the lover's frenzy from among those which accompany this passion in real life. And wherein does she demonstrate her excellence? In the skill with which she selects and fuses the most extreme and intense manifestations of these emotions:

A peer of the gods he seems to me, the man who sits over against you face to face, listening to the sweet tones of your voice and the loveliness of your laughing; it is this that sets my heart fluttering in my breast. For if I gaze on you but for a little while, I am no longer master of my voice, and my tongue lies useless, and a delicate flame runs over my skin. No more do I see with my eyes, and my ears are filled with uproar. The sweat pours down me, I am all seized with trembling, and I grow paler than the grass. My strength fails me, and I seem little short of dying.[1]

Are you not astonished at the way in which, as though they were gone from her and belonged to another, she at one and the same time calls up soul and body, ears, tongue, eyes, and colour; how, uniting opposites, she freezes while she burns, is both out of her senses and in her right mind? For she is either terrified or not far from dying. And all this is done so that not

1. This ode of Sappho (born about the middle of the seventh century B.C.) is traditionally regarded as a farewell song written for one of her favourite pupils, Anactoria. Imitation of the ode occurs in Catullus, *Carmina* LI.

one emotion alone may be seen in her, but a concourse of emotions. All such emotions as these are awakened in lovers, but it is, as I said, the selection of them in their most extreme forms and their fusion into a single whole that have given the poem its distinction.

In the same way Homer in describing storms singles out their most terrifying properties. The author of the *Arimaspeia*[1] thinks the following passage to be awe-inspiring:

> This also to our minds is a great marvel. There are men dwelling in the waters of the ocean, far away from land. Wretched creatures they are, for grievous is the trouble they undergo, fixing their gaze upon the stars and their spirit upon the waters. Often, methinks, they lift up their hands to the gods, and with their hearts raised heavenwards they pray in their misery.

It is obvious to anyone, I imagine, that this passage is more flowery than terrifying. But how does Homer set about it? Let us choose one out of many possible examples:

> And he fell upon them like a wave which, swollen by the storm-winds beneath the lowering clouds, bursts furiously over a hurrying ship. And the ship is all lost in foam, and the terrifying blast roars in the sail, and the souls of the crew are seized with a fearful shuddering, for barely can they slip out from under the clutch of death.[2]

Aratus made an attempt to adapt this same idea to his own purposes:

> And a slender plank wards off destruction.[3]

However, he has made it trivial and elegant instead of terrifying. Furthermore, by saying that a plank keeps away destruction, he has kept the danger within bounds – after all, the plank does keep it away. On the other hand, Homer does not for a moment limit the terror, but draws a picture of his sailors again and again, all the time, on the brink of destruction with the coming of each wave. Moreover, in 'out from under the clutch of

1. Aristeas of Proconnesus (*fl.* 580 B.C.) wrote an epic in three books on the Arimaspi, the dwellers of the far north.

2. *Odyssey* XV, 624–8.

3. Line 299 of the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, an Alexandrian poet writing in the first half of the third century B.C.

death' he has exerted an abnormal force in thrusting together prepositions not usually compounded, and has thus twisted his language to bring it into conformity with the impending disaster; and by this compressed language he has supremely well pictured the disaster and all but stamped on the diction the very image of the danger – 'slip out from under the clutch of death'. Not dissimilar are the passage of Archilochus[1] relating to the shipwreck, and that in which Demosthenes, describing the bringing of the news, begins, 'For it was evening . . . '.[2] It might be said that these writers have brought out the striking points in order of merit and massed them together, finding no place among them for anything frivolous, undignified, or long-winded. For such faults as these ruin the total effect of a passage, like air-holes and other orifices foisted on to impressive and harmonious buildings whose walls are ordered into a coherent structure.[3]

CHAPTER 11

Amplification

A MERIT associated with those already presented is that which is called amplification, that is, when the matters under discussion or the points of an argument allow of many pauses and many fresh starts from section to section, and the grand phrases come rolling out one after another with increasing effect.

This may be managed either by the rhetorical development of a commonplace, or by exaggeration, whether facts or arguments are to be stressed, or by the orderly disposition of factual points or of appeals to the feelings. There are, indeed, countless forms of amplification. Yet the speaker must be aware that, without the help of sublimity, none of these methods can of itself form a complete whole, unless indeed in the expression of pity or

1. Archilochus of Paros (*fl.* 650 B.C.).
2. Demosthenes, *De Corona*, 169.
3. This sentence is about the best that can be made of a corrupt passage which has been variously emended.

disparagement. In other forms of amplification, when you take away the element of the sublime, it will be like taking the soul out of the body; for their vigour will be completely drained away without the sustaining power of the sublime.

However, in the interests of clarity I must briefly indicate how my present precepts differ from those about which I have just spoken, that is, the marking-out of the most striking points and their organization into a single whole, and in what general respects sublimity is to be distinguished from the effects of amplification.

CHAPTER 12

Amplification Defined

Now the definition of the writers on rhetoric is not, in my view, acceptable. Amplification, they say, is language which invests the subject with grandeur. But obviously this definition could apply equally well to sublimity and to the emotional and the figurative styles, since these too invest language with some degree of grandeur. As I see it, they are to be distinguished from one another by the fact that sublimity consists in elevation, amplification in quantity; thus sublimity is often contained in a single idea, whereas amplification is always associated with quantity and a certain amount of redundancy. To sum it up in general terms, amplification is the accumulation of all the small points and incidental topics bearing on the subject-matter; it adds substance and strength to the argument by dwelling on it, differing from proof in that, while the latter demonstrates the point at issue . . .

(*Here two pages of the manuscript are lost*)

. . . extremely rich; like some ocean, he[1] often swells into a mighty expanse of grandeur. From this I should say that, where language is concerned, the orator,[2] being more concerned with the emotions, shows much fire and vehemence of spirit, whilst

1. Chapter 13 makes it clear that this refers to Plato.
2. Demosthenes.

Plato, standing firmly based upon his supreme dignity and majesty, though indeed he is not cold, has not the same vehemence.

It seems to me that it is on these same grounds, my dear Terentianus – if we Greeks may be allowed an opinion in this matter – that Cicero is to be differentiated from Demosthenes in his use of the grand style. Demosthenes is characterized by a sublimity which is for the most part rugged, Cicero by profusion. Demosthenes, by reason of his force, yes, and his speed and power and intensity, may be likened to a thunderbolt or flash of lightning, as it were burning up or seizing as his own all that he falls upon. But Cicero is, in my opinion, like a wide-spreading conflagration that rolls on to consume everything far and wide; he has within him an abundance of steady and enduring flame which can be let loose at whatever point he desires, and which is fed from one source after another.

However, you Romans should be able to form a better judgement in this matter. But the right place for the Demosthenean sublimity and intensity is in passages where hyperbole and powerful emotions are involved, and where the audience are to be swept off their feet. On the other hand, profusion is in order when it is necessary to flood them with words. It is for the most part appropriate to the treatment of rhetorical commonplaces, and of perorations and digressions; well suited, too, to all descriptive and epideictic[1] writings, to works of history and natural philosophy, and to a number of other types of literature.

CHAPTER 13

Plato and the Sublime. Imitation

Now although Plato – for I must return to him – flows with such a noiseless stream, he none the less achieves grandeur. You are familiar with his *Republic* and know his manner. 'Those,

1. Epideictic orations were one of the types of set speech defined in the rhetorical systems of the ancients – in Latin *genus demonstrativum*; they include such things as funeral orations, panegyrics, and speeches of dispraise.

therefore,' he says,[1] 'who have no experience of wisdom and goodness, and are always engaged in feasting and similar pleasures, are brought down, it would seem, to a lower level, and there wander about all their lives. They have never looked up towards the truth, nor risen higher, nor tasted of any pure and lasting pleasure. In the manner of cattle, they bend down with their gaze fixed always on the ground and on their feeding-places, grazing and fattening and copulating, and in their insatiable greed for these pleasures they kick and butt one another with horns and hoofs of iron, and kill one another if their desires are not satisfied.'

Provided that we are ready to give him due attention, this author shows us that, in addition to those already mentioned, there is another way that leads to the sublime. And what kind of a way is this? It is the imitation and emulation of the great historians and poets of the past. Let us steadfastly keep this aim in mind, my dear fellow. For many authors catch fire from the inspiration of others – just as we are told that the Pythian priestess, when she approaches the tripod standing by a cleft in the ground from which, they say, there is breathed out a divine vapour, is impregnated thence with the heavenly power, and by virtue of this afflatus is at once inspired to speak oracles. So too, as though also issuing from sacred orifices, certain emanations are conveyed from the genius of the men of old into the souls of those who emulate them, and, breathing in these influences, even those who show very few signs of inspiration derive some degree of divine enthusiasm from the grandeur of their predecessors.

Was Herodotus alone an extremely Homeric writer? No, for even earlier there was Stesichorus,[2] and Archilochus, and above all others Plato, who for his own use drew upon countless tributary streams from the great Homeric river. I should perhaps have had to prove this had not Ammonius[3] and his followers selected and recorded the facts.

1. *Republic* IX, 586.
2. Stesichorus (*c.* 640 – *c.* 555 B.C.), one of the great lyrical poets.
3. Ammonius (*fl.* 140 B.C.) carried on at Alexandria the work of his master Aristarchus, who has been described as 'the founder of scientific scholarship'.

Now this procedure is not plagiarism; rather it is like taking impressions from beautiful pictures or statues or other works of art. I do not think there would have been so fine a bloom on Plato's philosophical doctrines, or that he would so often have embarked on poetic subject-matter and phraseology, had he not been striving heart and soul with Homer for first place, like a young contestant entering the ring with a long-admired champion, perhaps showing too keen a spirit of emulation in his desire to break a lance with him, so to speak, yet getting some profit from the endeavour. For as Hesiod says,[1] 'This strife is good for mortals.' And indeed the fight for fame and the crown of victory are noble and very well worth the winning where even to be worsted by one's predecessors carries no discredit.

CHAPTER 14

Some Practical Advice

It is well, then, that we too, when we are working at something that demands grandeur both of conception and of expression, should carefully consider how perhaps Homer might have said this very thing, or how Plato, or Demosthenes, or Thucydides in his History, might have given it sublimity. For conjured up before our eyes, as it were, by our spirit of emulation, these great men will raise our minds to the standards we have laid down for ourselves.

Still more will this be so if we put to ourselves the further query, 'How would Homer or Demosthenes, if he had been present, have listened to this passage of mine, and how would it have affected him?' For indeed it would be a severe ordeal to bring our own utterances before such a court of justice and such a theatre as this, to make a pretence of submitting our writings to the scrutiny of such semi-divine judges and witnesses.

It would be even more stimulating if you added the question, 'What kind of hearing should I get from all future ages if I

1. *Works and Days* 24.

wrote this?' But if anyone shrinks from the expression of anything beyond the comprehension of his own time and age, the conceptions of his mind are obviously obscure and incomplete, and are bound to come to nothing, since they are by no means brought to such perfection as to ensure their fame in later ages.

CHAPTER 15

Imagery and the Power of the Imagination

FURTHERMORE, my dear boy, dignity, grandeur, and powers of persuasion are to a very large degree derived from images – for that is what some people call the representation of mental pictures. In a general way the term 'image' is used of any mental conception, from whatever source it presents itself, which gives rise to speech; but in current usage the word is applied to passages in which, carried away by your feelings, you imagine you are actually seeing the subject of your description, and enable your audience as well to see it. You will have noticed that imagery means one thing with orators and another with poets – that in poetry its aim is to work on the feelings, in oratory to produce vividness of description, though indeed in both cases an attempt is made to stir the feelings.

Mother, I beseech you, do not set upon me those blood-boltered and snake-like hags. See there, see there, they approach, they leap upon me![1]

and again,

Ah! She will slay me! Whither shall I fly?[2]

In these passages the poet himself had 'seen' the Furies, and he almost compelled his audience, too, to see what he had imagined.

Now Euripides expends his highest powers in giving tragic expression to these two passions, madness and love, and he is more brilliantly successful with these, I think, than with any others, although he is not afraid to make incursions into other

1. Euripides, *Orestes* 255–7.
2. Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 291.

realms of the imagination. While he is very far from possessing a natural grandeur, yet on many occasions he forces his genius to tragic heights, and where sublimity is concerned, each time, in the words of Homer,

with his tail he lashes his ribs and flanks on both sides, and goads himself on to fight.[1]

For example, when the Sun hands the reins to Phaethon, he says:

'And do not as you drive venture into the Libyan sky, for being tempered with no moisture it will burn up your wheel.'[2]

And he goes on,

'But speed your course towards the seven Pleiades.' And hearing this, the boy took hold of the reins, and lashed the flanks of his winged team, and they winged their path up to the cloudy ridges of the sky. And hard behind rode his father, astride the Dog-Star's back, schooling his son: 'Drive that way! Now this way guide the chariot, this way!'

Now would you not say that the soul of the poet goes into the chariot with the boy, sharing his danger and joining the horses in their flight? For he could never have formed such an image had he not been swept along neck by neck with these celestial activities. You will find the same in the words he gives to Cassandra:

Yet, you Trojans, lovers of steeds . . .[3]

Aeschylus, too, ventures on images of a most heroic cast, as when he says in his *Seven against Thebes*:

Seven resistless warrior-captains have slit a bullock's throat over an iron-rimmed shield, and have brushed their hands over the bullock's blood and sworn an oath by War and Havoc and Terror, the lover of blood . . .[4]

1. *Iliad* XX, 170–1.
2. This and the following passage are taken from the lost *Phaethon* of Euripides.
3. From another lost play of Euripides.
4. *Seven against Thebes*, 42–6.

Here they pledge themselves by a joint oath to a pitiless death. Sometimes, however, Aeschylus introduces ideas that are unfinished and crude and harsh; yet Euripides in a desire to emulate him comes dangerously near to committing the same faults. For example, in Aeschylus the palace of Lycurgus at the appearance of Dionysus is described in unusual terms as being divinely possessed:

Then the house is in an ecstasy, and the roof is inspired with a Bacchic frenzy.[1]

Euripides has expressed the same idea differently, softening it down:

And the whole mountain joined with them in their Bacchic frenzy.[2]

Sophocles, too, has used excellent imagery in describing the death of Oedipus as he entombs himself amid portents from the sky,[3] and in his account of how, at the departure of the Greeks, Achilles shows himself above his tomb to those who are sailing away,[4] a scene which I think no one has depicted more vividly than Simonides.

But it would be out of the question to quote all the examples. However, as I have said, those from the poets display a good deal of romantic exaggeration, and everywhere exceed the bounds of credibility, whereas the finest feature of the orator's imagery is always its adherence to reality and truth. Whenever the texture of the speech becomes poetical and fabulous, and falls into all sorts of impossibilities, such deviations seem strange and unnatural. Our brilliant modern orators, for example, see Furies, heaven help us, just as though they were tragedians, and, noble fellows that they are, they cannot even understand that when Orestes says,

Be off, for you are one of my avenging Furies clasping my waist to hurl me down to hell,[5]

he is imagining this because he is mad.

1. From a lost play of Aeschylus.
2. Euripides, *Bacchae* 726.
3. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1,586–666.
4. In his lost *Polyxena*. The poem in which Simonides describes the same episode is also lost.
5. Euripides, *Orestes* 264–5.

What, then, is the effect of imagery when it is used in oratory? Among other things, it can infuse much passion and energy into speeches, but when it is combined with the argumentative passages it not only persuades the hearer, but actually masters him.

'Suppose,' says Demosthenes,[1] to give an example, 'suppose that at this very moment an uproar were to be heard in front of the courts, and someone were to tell us that the prison had been broken open and the prisoners were escaping, there is no one, old or young, so irresponsible that he would not give all the help in his power; moreover, if someone were to come and tell us that so-and-so was the person who let them out, he would at once be put to death without a hearing.' Then of course there is Hyperides,[2] who was put on trial when he had proposed the enfranchisement of the slaves after the great defeat; his answer was that it was not himself, the advocate, who had framed the measure, but the battle of Chaeronea. Here the orator has at one and the same time developed an argument and used his imagination, and his conception has therefore transcended the bounds of mere persuasion. In all such cases our ears always, by some natural law, seize upon the stronger element, so that we are attracted away from the demonstration of fact to the startling image, and the argument lies below the surface of the accompanying brilliance. And it is not unreasonable that we should be affected in this way, for when two forces are combined to produce a single effect, the greater always attracts to itself the virtues of the lesser.

I have gone far enough in my discussion of sublimity of thought, as it is produced by greatness of mind, imitation, or imagery.

1. Demosthenes, *Timocrates* 208.

2. Hyperides (389–22 B.C.), a distinguished Attic orator. See Chapter 34. Plutarch relates (*Moralia* 849 A) that after the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea Hyperides proposed an extension of the franchise, and, when he was impeached for the illegality of his proposal, declared, 'The arms of the Macedonians obscured my vision; it was not I who proposed the measure, but the battle of Chaeronea.'

CHAPTER 16

Rhetorical Figures: Adjuration

We now come to the place which I have duly set aside for rhetorical figures, for they too, when properly handled, will contribute in no small measure, as I have said, to the effect of grandeur. However, since it would be a toilsome and indeed endless business to consider them all closely at this stage, I shall merely, in order to confirm my proposition, run over a few of those which make for grandeur of utterance.

In the following passage Demosthenes is putting forward an argument in support of his policy. What was the natural procedure for doing this? 'You were not wrong, you who undertook the struggle for the freedom of the Greeks, and you have a precedent for this here at home. For those who fought at Marathon were not wrong, nor those at Salamis, nor those at Plataea.'[1] But when, as though carried away by a divine enthusiasm and by the inspiration of Phoebus himself, he uttered his oath by the champions of Greece, 'By those who stood the shock at Marathon, it cannot be that you were wrong,' it would seem that, by his use of this single figure of adjuration, which I here give the name of apostrophe, he has deified his ancestors by suggesting that we ought to swear by men who have died such deaths as we swear by gods; he has instilled into his judges the spirit of the men who stood there in the forefront of the danger, and has transformed the natural flow of his argument into a passage of transcending sublimity, endowing it with the passion and the power of conviction that arise from unheard-of and extraordinary oaths. At the same time he has infused into the minds of his audience words which act in some sort as an antidote and a remedy, so that, uplifted by these eulogies, they come to feel just as proud of the war against Philip as of the triumphs at Marathon and Salamis. By all these

1. *De Corona* 208. Demosthenes is defending, by reference to the past, his aggressive policy which resulted in the Athenian defeat at Chaeronea.

means he has been able to carry his hearers away with the figure he has employed.

It is said, indeed, that Demosthenes found the germ of this oath in Eupolis:[1]

> For by the fight I fought at Marathon, no one of them shall vex my heart and not pay for it.

But there is nothing grand about the mere swearing of an oath; we must take into account the place, the manner, the circumstances, and the motive. In the Eupolis there is nothing but an oath, and that addressed to the Athenians while they were still enjoying prosperity and in no need of consolation. Moreover, the poet has not in his oath deified the warriors in order to engender in his audience a high opinion of their valour, but has wandered away from those who stood the shock to something inanimate, that is, the fight. In Demosthenes the oath is designed for men who have suffered defeat, so that the Athenians may no longer regard Chaeronea as a disaster; and at the same time it is, as I said, a proof that no wrong has been done, an example, a demonstration of the efficacy of oaths, a eulogy, and an exhortation. And since the orator was likely to be faced with the objection, 'You are speaking of a defeat that resulted from your policy, yet your oath relates to victories,' in what follows he keeps on the safe side and measures every word, showing that even in orgies of the imagination it is necessary to remain sober. 'Those who stood in the forefront of the battle at Marathon,' he says, 'and those who fought aboard ship at Salamis and Artemisium, and those who stood shoulder to shoulder at Plataea.' Nowhere does he speak of the 'victors'; everywhere he cunningly avoids mention of the result, since it was a happy one and the reverse of what happened at Chaeronea. Thus he anticipates objections and carries his audience with him. 'To all of whom, Aeschines,' he adds, 'the state gave a public funeral, not only to those who were successful.'

1. Eupolis (*c.* 446 – *c.* 411 B.C.) was a poet of the Old Comedy. The lines come from his lost comedy *Demi.*

CHAPTER 17

Rhetorical Figures and Sublimity

In this matter, my dear friend, I must not omit an observation of my own, which, however, shall be quite concisely stated. This is that, by some quality innate in them, the rhetorical figures reinforce the sublime, and in their turn derive a marvellous degree of support from it. I will tell you where and how this happens. The unconscionable use of figures is peculiarly subject to suspicion, and engenders impressions of hidden traps and plots and fallacies. This is true when the speech is addressed to a judge with absolute authority, and still more to despots, kings, or rulers in high places, for such a one is at once annoyed if, like a simple child, he is caught on the wrong foot by the rhetorical devices of a highly-skilled orator. Accepting the fallacy as a personal insult, he sometimes turns quite savage, and even if he masters his rage, he becomes utterly impervious to the persuasive quality of the speech. Thus a rhetorical figure would appear to be most effective when the fact that it is a figure is not apparent.

Sublimity and the expression of strong feeling are, therefore, a wonderfully helpful antidote against the suspicion that attends the use of figures. The cunning artifice remains out of sight, associated from now on with beauty and sublimity, and all suspicion is put to flight. Sufficient evidence of this is the passage already mentioned, 'I swear by the men of Marathon!' But by what means has the orator here concealed his figure? Obviously by its very brilliance. For in much the same way as dim lights vanish in the radiance of the sun, so does the all-pervading effluence of grandeur utterly obscure the artifices of rhetoric.

Something of the same kind occurs also in painting. For although light and shade as represented by colours may lie side by side on the same surface, it is the light that first catches the eye and seems not only to stand out, but also to be much nearer. So also is it with literature: by some natural affinity and by their

brilliance, things that appeal to our feelings and sublime conceptions lie nearer to our hearts, and always catch our attention before the figures, overshadowing their artistry, and keeping it out of sight, so to speak.

CHAPTER 18

Rhetorical Questions

BUT what are we to say on the matter of questions and answers? Does not Demosthenes aim at enhancing the grandeur and effectiveness of his speeches very considerably by the very way in which he exploits these figures and their appeal to the imagination? 'Now tell me, do you want to go about asking one another, "Is there any news?"? For what stranger news could there be than that of a Macedonian conquering Greece? "Is Philip dead?" "No, but he is ill." What difference does it make to you? For even if anything should happen to him, you will soon invent another Philip.'[1] And again, 'Let us sail against Macedonia,' he says. '"But where shall we land?" someone asks. The mere fact of our fighting will find out the weak spots in Philip's strategy.'[2] If this had been given as a bald statement, it would have been completely ineffective; but as it is, the inspired rapidity in the play of question and answer, together with the device of meeting his own objections as though they were someone else's, has not only added to the sublimity of his words, but also given them greater conviction, and all this by the use of this particular figure. For a display of feeling is more effective when it seems not to be premeditated on the part of the speaker, but to have arisen from the occasion; and this method of asking questions and providing your own answers gives the appearance of being a natural outburst of feeling. Those who are being questioned by others are stimulated into answering the questions spontaneously, and with energy and complete candour; in the same way the rhetorical figure of question and answer beguiles the audience into thinking that

1. Demosthenes, *Philippic* I, 10.
2. ibid. 44.

each deliberately considered point has been struck out and put into words on the spur of the moment. Furthermore – for the following passage has been accepted as one of the most sublime in Herodotus – if thus . . .

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CHAPTER 19

Asyndeton, or the Omission of Conjunctions

. . . the words come gushing out, as it were, set down without connecting links, and almost outstripping the speaker himself. 'And, locking their shields,' says Xenophon,[1] 'they pressed forward, fought, slew, were slain.' Then there are the words of Eurylochus:

> We came through the oak-coppice, as you bade, renowned Odysseus. We saw amid the forest-glens a beautiful palace.[2]

The phrases, disconnected, but none the less rapid, give the impression of an agitation which at the same time checks the utterance and urges it on. And the poet has produced such an effect by his use of asyndeton.

CHAPTER 20

The Accumulation of Figures

A COMBINATION of figures for a common purpose usually has a very moving effect – when two or three unite in a kind of partnership to add force, persuasiveness, and beauty. Thus in Demosthenes' speech against Meidias you will find examples of asyndeton interwoven with the figures of anaphora and diatyposis:[3] 'For the aggressor might do many things, some

1. Xenophon, *Historia Graeca* IV, 3, 19.
2. *Odyssey* X, 251–2.
3. Anaphora is the repetition of words; diatyposis is vivid description.

of which the victim would be unable to describe to anyone else, by his manner, his looks, his voice.' Then, in order that the speech may not, as it proceeds, remain at a standstill as far as these particular effects are concerned (for standing still connotes calm, whereas emotion, being an upheaval or agitation of the soul, connotes disorder), he at once hurries on to fresh examples of asyndeton and anaphora: 'By his manner, his looks, his voice, when he acts with insolence, when he acts with hostility, when he strikes you with his fists, when he strikes you like a slave.' In this way the orator does just the same as the aggressor; he belabours the judges' minds with blow after blow. He goes on from here to make yet another hurricane onslaught: 'When he strikes you with his fists,' he says, 'when he beats you about the face – this rouses you, this drives men out of their wits when they are not used to being trampled underfoot. No one describing this could bring out the strength of its effect.' Thus all the way through, although with continual variations, he preserves the essential character of the repetitions and the asyndeta, and thus too his order is disordered, and similarly his disorder embraces a certain element of order.

CHAPTER 21

Conjunctions: Some Disadvantages

Now, if you will, try putting in the conjunctions, in the manner of Isocrates[1] and his disciples: 'Furthermore, this too must not be overlooked, that the aggressor might do many things, first by his manner, then by his looks, and then again by his mere voice.' If you amplify it like this, phrase by phrase, you will see that the drive and ruggedness of the emotion that is being exploited, toned down into smoothness by the use of the conjunctions, lapse into pointlessness and at once lose all their fire. If you tie runners together you will deprive them of their speed; in exactly the same way emotion resents being hampered

1. Isocrates (436–338 B.C.), a great Athenian orator. His disciples included Hyperides (see Chapters 15 and 34) and Theopompus (see Chapters 31 and 43).

by conjunctions and other appendages of the kind, for it then loses its freedom of motion and the impression it gives of being shot from a catapult.

CHAPTER 22

The Figure of Hyperbaton, or Inversion

HYPERBATA, or inversions, must be put into the same class. These consist in the arrangement of words or ideas out of their normal sequence, and they carry, so to speak, the genuine stamp of powerful emotion. There are people who, when they are angry or frightened or irritated or carried away by jealousy or any other feeling – for there are innumerable forms of emotion, and indeed no one would be able to say just how many – will sometimes let themselves be deflected; and often, after they have brought forward one point, they will drop in others without rhyme or reason, and then, under the stress of their agitation, they will come right round to their original position just as though they were being chased by a whirlwind. Dragged in every direction by their rapid changes of mood, they will keep altering the arrangement of their words and ideas, losing their natural sequence and introducing all sorts of variations. In the same way the best authors will use inversion in such a way that their representations will assume the aspect of natural processes at work. For art is perfect only when it looks like nature, and again, nature hits the mark only when she conceals the art that is within her.

This may be exemplified by the words of Dionysius the Phocaean in Herodotus:[1] 'For our affairs stand on a razor's edge, men of Ionia, whether we are to be free men or slaves, and runaway slaves at that. Now, therefore, if you are prepared to accept hardships, straightway there is toil for you, but you will be able to overcome your enemies.' Here the normal order would have been, 'O men of Ionia, now is the time for you to take toil upon you; for our affairs stand on a razor's edge.' However, the speaker has transposed 'men of Ionia', starting at

1. Herodotus, VI, 11.

once with the thought of the fear, as though in this pressing danger he would not even address his hearers first. Furthermore, he has inverted the order of his ideas; for instead of saying that they must endure toil, which is the point of his exhortation, he first gives them the reason why they must toil when he says, 'Our affairs stand on a razor's edge.' Thus what he says does not seem premeditated, but forced out of him.

Thucydides is even more skilful in his use of inversions to dissociate things which are by their nature one and indivisible. Demosthenes, though indeed he is not as wilful as Thucydides, is the most immoderate of all in his use of this kind of figure, and through inversions he gives the impression of speaking extremely masterfully, and, what is more, of speaking impromptu; moreover, he carries his audience with him to share in the dangers of his long inversions. For he will often hold up the sense of what he has begun to express, and meanwhile he will in a strange and unlikely order pile one idea on top of another, drawn from any kind of source and just dropped into the middle of what he is saying, inducing in his hearer the fear that the whole structure of the sentence will fall to pieces, and compelling him in his agitation to share in the risk the speaker is taking; and then unexpectedly, after a long interval, he will bring out the long-awaited phrase just where it is most effective, at the very end, and thus, by the very audacity and recklessness of his inversions, he administers a much more powerful shock. I forbear to give examples, since there are so many of them.

CHAPTER 23

Polyptoton: Interchange of Singular and Plural

THE figures called polyptota[1] (accumulations, variations, and climaxes) are, as you know, very powerful auxiliaries in the production of elegance and of every kind of sublime and emotional effect. Observe, too, how greatly an exposition is

1. Strictly speaking, polyptoton is the use of more than one case of the same word, but Longinus seems to apply it also to rhetorical effects gained by changes in number, person, tense, or gender.

diversified and enlivened by changes in case, tense, person, number, and gender. In the matter of number, I can say that the decorative quality of a passage is not enhanced only by words which are singular in form, but which on close examination are found to have a plural meaning, as in

> Straightway a countless host ranged along the beaches send out a cry, 'Tunny!'[1]

But it is more noteworthy that at times the use of the plural in place of the singular has a more resounding effect, and impresses us by the very idea of multitude implied in the plural number. This is exemplified by Sophocles in some lines spoken by Oedipus:

> O marriages, marriages, it is you that begot me and gave me birth, and then brought to light again the same seed, and showed fathers, brothers, and sons as being all kindred blood, and brides, wives, and mothers, too, and all the foulest deeds that are done among men.[2]

All these relate to a single name, that of Oedipus, with that of Jocasta on the other side; however, the expansion of the number serves to pluralize the misfortunes as well.

There is the same kind of multiplication in the line, 'Forth came Hectors, and Sarpedons too;'[3] and again in Plato's passage on the Athenians which I have also quoted in another work: 'For no Pelopes nor Cadmi nor Aegypti and Danai, nor any other hordes of barbarians by birth share our home with us, but we who are pure Greeks and not semi-barbarians live here', and the rest of it.[4] For naturally the facts sound more impressive from this accumulation of names in groups. However, this should not be done except on occasions when the subject admits of amplification or redundancy or exaggeration or emotionalism – any one or more of these; for to be hung all over with bells is altogether too pretentious.[5]

1. Author unknown. Presumably the passage refers to a crowd of fisherfolk hailing the appearance of a shoal of tunny.
2. *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1403–8.
3. Author unknown.
4. Plato, *Menexenus* 245 D.
5. The metaphor here refers to the bells hung on the trappings of a war-horse. Roberts translates, 'a richly caparisoned style'.

CHAPTER 24

Polyptoton: Conversion of Plural to Singular

FURTHERMORE, the opposite process, the contraction of plural ideas into a singular form, sometimes achieves an outstanding effect of sublimity. 'Afterwards,' says Demosthenes,[1] 'the whole Peloponnese was at variance.' Again, 'And when Phrynicus produced his play *The Capture of Miletus* the theatre burst into tears.'[2] To compress the number from multiplicity into unity gives a stronger impression of a single entity. In both examples the reason for the striking effect is, I think, the same. Where the words are singular, to turn them into the plural suggests an unexpected burst of feeling; where they are plural, and are fused into a fine-sounding singular, the change in the opposite direction produces an effect of surprise.

CHAPTER 25

Polyptoton: Interchange of Tenses

AGAIN, if you introduce circumstances that are past in time as happening at the present moment, you will turn the passage from mere narrative into vivid actuality. 'Someone,' says Xenophon, 'has fallen under Cyrus's horse, and being trampled on, strikes the horse in the belly with his sword. It rears and throws Cyrus, and he falls to the ground.'[3] Thucydides is particularly fond of this device.

1. *De Corona* 18.
2. Herodotus, VI, 21. Phrynicus was a tragic playwright contemporary with Aeschylus. Herodotus continues the anecdote quoted here by recounting that the Athenians fined Phrynicus 1000 drachmas for reminding them in *The Capture of Miletus* of a disaster which had befallen a friendly state, and ordered that the play should never again be performed.
3. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* VII, i, 37.

CHAPTER 26

Polyptoton: Variations of Person, or Personal Address

In the same way the change of person is striking, and often makes the hearer feel that he is moving in the thick of the danger:

You would say that they met in the shock of war, all unwearied and undaunted, so impetuously did they rush into the fray.[1]

Then there is Aratus's

Do not in that month entrust yourself to the surges of the ocean.[2]

Herodotus does much the same kind of thing: 'From the city of Elephantine you will sail upwards, until you come to a level plain; and after you have crossed this tract, you will board again another ship and sail for two days, and then you will come to a great city whose name is Meroe.'[3] You see, my friend, how, as he takes you in imagination through the places in question, he transforms hearing into sight. All such passages, by their direct personal form of address, bring the hearer right into the middle of the action being described. When you seem to be addressing, not the whole audience, but a single member of it –

But you would not have known of Tydeus's son for which of the armies he fought –[4]

you will affect him more profoundly, and make him more attentive and full of active interest, if you rouse him by these appeals to him personally.

1. *Iliad* XV, 697–8.
2. Aratus (*fl.* 270 B.C.), one of the didactic poets of Alexandria. This is line 299 of his *Phaenomena*.
3. Herodotus, II, 29.
4. *Iliad* V, 85.

CHAPTER 27

Polyptoton: Conversion to the First Person

AGAIN, there are times when a writer, while speaking of a character, suddenly breaks off and converts himself into that character. A figure of this kind is in a way an outburst of emotion:

> And with a far-echoing shout Hector cried out to the Trojans to rush against the ships and leave the blood-spattered spoils. And if I spy anyone who of his own will holds back from the ships, I will surely bring about his death.[1]

Here the poet has taken upon himself the presentation of the narrative, as is appropriate, and then suddenly, without any warning, has attributed the abrupt threat to the angry chieftain. Had he inserted, 'Hector said so and so', it would have given a frigid effect; as it is, the change in form of the passage has anticipated the sudden change of speakers. Accordingly this figure should be used for preference when a sudden crisis will not give the author time to linger, but compels him to change at once from one character to another.

There is another example in Hecataeus:[2] 'Ceyx took this badly and at once ordered the descendants of Heracles to depart. For it is not in my power to help you. Therefore, in order that you may not perish yourselves and injure me, take yourselves off to some other country.'

In his *Aristogeiton* Demosthenes has by a rather different method used change of person to indicate a rapid play of emotion. 'And will none of you,' he says, 'be found to feel disgust and indignation at the violence of this vile and shameless creature, who – O, you most abandoned of men – whose unbridled speech is not shut in by gates and doors which might well be opened . . . .'[3] With his sense incomplete, he has made

1. *Iliad* XV, 346–9.
2. Hecataeus of Miletus (*fl.* 520 B.C.), historian and geographer.
3. Demosthenes, *Aristogeiton* I, 27.

a sudden change, and in his indignation has all but split a single phrase between two persons – 'who – O, you most abandoned . . . '. Thus, while he has turned his speech round to address Aristogeiton, and seems to have left him out of account,[1] yet with this display of passion he has turned it on him much more forcefully. The same thing occurs in Penelope's speech:

Herald, why have those highborn suitors sent you here? Is it to tell the handmaids of the godlike Odysseus to cease from their labours and prepare a banquet for them? Would that they had never wooed me, nor elsewhere gathered together, that this now were the latest and last of their feasting, you that assemble together and waste so much of our substance, the store of the prudent Telemachus. Nor did you ever in the bygone days of your childhood hear from your fathers what manner of man Odysseus was.[2]

CHAPTER 28

Periphrasis

No one, I think, would dispute that periphrasis contributes to the sublime. For as in music the sweetness of the dominant melody is enhanced by what are known as the decorative additions, so periphrasis often harmonizes with the direct expression of a thought and greatly embellishes it, especially if it is not bombastic or inelegant, but pleasantly tempered.

This is pretty well illustrated by Plato at the beginning of his Funeral Oration:[3] 'We have done what gives them the tribute that is their due, and having gained this, they proceed along their appointed path, escorted publicly by their country, and each man privately by his kinsfolk.' Death, you see, he calls 'their appointed path', and their having been granted the accustomed rites he describes as a kind of 'public escort on the

1. There is an inconsistency here. W. Hamilton Fyfe has in his translation accepted a conjectural emendation which enables him to read, 'while swinging his speech round on to Aristogeiton and appearing to abandon the jury . . . .'

2. *Odyssey* IV, 681–9.

3. Plato, *Menexenus* 236 D.

part of their native land'. Surely he has considerably increased the dignity of his conception here. Has he not made music of the unadorned diction that was his starting-point, and shed over it with something of a tuneful harmony the melodiousness that arises from his periphrasis?

Then there is Xenophon: 'You regard toil as the guide to a life of pleasure; you have garnered in your hearts the best of all possessions and the fittest for warriors. For nothing rejoices you so much as praise.'[1] By rejecting 'you are willing to work hard' in favour of 'you make toil the guide to a life of pleasure', and by expanding the rest of the sentence in the same way, he has added to his eulogy a certain grandeur of thought. And this is true also of that inimitable sentence in Herodotus: 'Upon those Scythians who despoiled her temple the goddess cast a malady that made women of them.'[2]

CHAPTER 29

The Dangers of Periphrasis

HOWEVER, periphrasis is a hazardous business, more so than any other figure, unless it is used with a certain sense of proportion. For it quickly lapses into insipidity, akin to empty chatter and dullness of wit. This is why even Plato, who always uses figures with skill, but sometimes with a certain lack of timeliness, is mocked when he says in his *Laws* that 'neither golden nor silver treasure should be allowed to establish itself and dwell in a city';[3] so that if he had been forbidding people to possess herds, says the critic, he would obviously have said 'ovine and bovine treasure'.

However, my digression on the use of figures and their bearing on the sublime has gone on long enough, my dear Terentianus. They are all means of increasing the animation and the emotional impact of style, and emotional effects play as large a part in the production of the sublime as the study of character does in the production of pleasure.

1. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* I, v, 12.
2. Herodotus, I, 105.
3. *Laws* 801 B.

CHAPTER 30

The Proper Choice of Diction

SINCE in discourse thought and diction are for the most part mutually interdependent, we must further consider whether any other elements that come under the heading of diction remain to be studied. It is probably superfluous to explain to those who already know it how wonderfully the choice of appropriate and high-sounding words moves and enchants an audience, and to remind them that such a choice is the highest aim of all orators and authors; for of itself it imparts to style, as though to the finest statues, at once grandeur, beauty, mellowness, weight, force, power, and any other worthy quality you can think of, and endows the facts as it were with a living voice. For words finely used are in truth the very light of thought. Yet it would not do to use such grand diction all the time, for to apply great and stately terms to trifling matters would be like putting a big tragic mask on a tiny child. However, in poetry and . . .

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CHAPTER 31

Familiar Language

. . . very thought-provoking and powerful; so too is Anacreon's 'No longer do I care for the Thracian filly.'[1] In this way also that unusual term employed by Theopompus deserves praise, for by reason of the analogy implied it seems to me to be highly expressive, although Cecilius for some reason finds fault with it: 'Philip,' says Theopompus, 'had a genius for stomaching

1. From a fragment of Anacreon, the sixth-century lyric poet. The word 'filly' used here is derived from a conjectural emendation which is suggested by the context, and which seems appropriate to the point that Longinus is making.

things.' Now the homely term is sometimes much more expressive than elegant diction, for, being taken from everyday life, it is at once recognized, and carries the more conviction from its familiarity. Thus, in connexion with a man whose greedy nature makes him put up patiently and cheerfully with things that are shameful and sordid, the words 'stomaching things' are extremely vivid.[1] Much the same may be said of Herodotus's expressions: 'Cleomenes in his madness cut his own flesh into strips with a dagger until, having made a thorough mince of himself, he perished;' and 'Pythes continued fighting on the ship until he was all cut into shreds.'[2] These expressions are on the very edge of vulgarity, but their expressiveness saves them from actually being vulgar.

CHAPTER 32

Metaphor

WITH regard to the appropriate number of metaphors, Cecilius appears to side with those who lay down that two, or at most three, should be brought together in the same passage. Demosthenes is again the standard in this context. The appropriate occasion for their use is when the emotions come pouring out like a torrent, and irresistibly carry along with them a host of metaphors. 'Men,' he says, 'who are steeped in blood, who are flatterers, who have each of them mutilated the limbs of their own fatherlands, who have pledged their liberty by drinking first to Philip, and now to Alexander, measuring their happiness by their bellies and their basest appetites, and who have uprooted that liberty and that freedom from despotism which were to the Greeks of earlier days the rules and standards of integrity.'[3] Here the orator's indignation against the traitors casts a veil over the number of figurative expressions he has used.

1. Theopompus was a historian of the mid fourth century B.C., a disciple of Isocrates.
2. Herodotus, VI, 75; VII, 181.
3. *De Corona* 296.

Now Aristotle and Theophrastus declare that the following phrases have a softening effect on bold metaphors: 'as if', and 'as it were', and 'if one may put it like this', and 'if one may venture the expression'; for the qualifications, they say, mitigate the boldness. I accept this, but at the same time, as I said when I was talking about rhetorical figures, the timely expression of violent emotions, together with true sublimity, is the appropriate antidote for the number and boldness of metaphors. For the onward rush of passion has the property of sweeping everything before it, or rather of requiring bold imagery as something altogether indispensable; it does not allow the hearer leisure to consider the number of metaphors, since he is carried away by the enthusiasm of the speaker.

Furthermore, in the handling of commonplaces and of description nothing so much confers distinction as a continuous series of metaphors. It is by this means that the anatomy of the human body is superbly depicted in Xenophon,[1] and still more divinely in Plato.[2] The head, says Plato, is a citadel, and the neck is constructed as an isthmus between the head and the breast; and the vertebrae, he says, are set below like pivots. Pleasure tempts men to evil, and the tongue is the touchstone of taste. The heart is the fuel-store of the veins, the fountain from which the blood begins its vigorous course, and it keeps its station in the guard-house of the body. The various passages he calls the lanes. 'And for the thumping of the heart which takes place when danger is imminent or when anger is rising, when it becomes fiery-hot, the gods,' he says, 'have devised some relief by implanting the lungs, which, being soft and bloodless, and pierced inwardly with pores, serve as a kind of buffer, so that when anger boils up in the heart, it may throb against a yielding substance and not be damaged.' The seat of the desires he compares with the women's apartments, and that of anger with the men's. Then the spleen is the napkin of the entrails, from which it is filled with waste matter, and swells and festers. 'And after this,' he says, 'they covered everything over with flesh, which they put there, like felt matting, as a protection against attacks from outside.' And he

1. *Memorabilia* I, iv, 5.
2. The descriptions are drawn from the *Timaeus* 65 C – 85 E.

called the blood the fodder of the flesh, adding that, 'in order to provide nourishment, they irrigated the body, cutting channels as is done in gardens, so that, the body being perforated with conduits, the rivulets of the veins might flow on as though from some never-failing source.' And when the end comes, he says, the cables of the soul, like those of a ship, are loosed, and she is set free. These and innumerable similar metaphors form a continuous succession. But those I have mentioned are enough to show that figurative language is a natural source of grandeur, and that metaphors contribute to sublimity; and also that it is emotional and descriptive passages that most gladly find room for them.

However, it is obvious, even without my stating it, that the use of metaphors, like all the other beauties of style, is liable to lead to excess. In this respect even Plato is severely criticized, on the ground that he is often carried away by a kind of linguistic frenzy into harsh and intemperate metaphors and bombastic allegory. 'For it is not easy to see,' he says, 'that a city needs to be mixed like a bowl of wine, in which the strong, raging wine seethes as it is poured in, but when it is chastened by another god who is sober, its association with such good company turns it into an excellent and temperate drink.'[1] To call water 'a sober god', say the critics, and to describe mixing as 'chastening', is to use the language of some poet who is not in fact sober.

Cecilius, too, has picked on such defects as these, and in the works he has written in praise of Lysias he has actually dared to represent Lysias as being in all respects superior to Plato. But here he has given way to two uncritical impulses; for although he is even fonder of Lysias than of himself, his hatred for Plato altogether surpasses his love for Lysias. However, he is merely being contentious, and his premisses are not, as he thought, admitted. For he prefers the orator, whom he regards as faultless and without blemish, to Plato, who often made mistakes. But this is not the truth of the matter, nor anything like the truth.

1. Plato, *Laws* 773 C.

CHAPTER 33

Superiority of Flawed Sublimity to Flawless Mediocrity

SUPPOSE we take some writer who really may be considered flawless and beyond reproach. In this context we must surely ask ourselves in general terms, with reference to both verse and prose, which is superior, grandeur accompanied by a few flaws, or mediocre correctness, entirely sound and free from error though it may be. Yes, and further, whether in literature the first place should rightly be given to the greater number of virtues, or to virtues which are greater in themselves. For these questions are proper to a study of sublimity, and for every reason they should be resolved.

Now I am well aware that the highest genius is very far from being flawless, for entire accuracy runs the risk of descending to triviality, whereas in the grand manner, as in the possession of great wealth, something is bound to be neglected. Again, it may be inevitable that men of humble or mediocre endowments, who never run any risks and never aim at the heights, should in the normal course of events enjoy a greater freedom from error, while great abilities remain subject to danger by reason of their very greatness. And in the second place, I know that it is always the less admirable aspects of all human endeavours that are most widely noticed; the remembrance of mistakes remains ineradicable, while that of virtues quickly melts away.

I have myself observed a good many faults in Homer and our other authors of the highest distinction, and I cannot say that I enjoy finding these slips; however, I would not call them wilful errors, but rather careless oversights let in casually and at random by the heedlessness of genius. I am none the less certain that the greater virtues, even if they are not consistently shown throughout the composition, should always be voted into the first place – for the greatness of mind that they represent, if for no other reason. Now Apollonius reveals himself in his

Argonautica[1] as an impeccable poet, and Theocritus is extremely successful in his pastorals, apart from a few surface blemishes. Yet would you not rather choose to be Homer than Apollonius?

And again, is Eratosthenes in his *Erigone*,[2] which is an entirely flawless little poem, a greater poet than Archilochus, whose verse is often ill-arranged, but who has surges of a divine inspiration which it would be difficult to bring under the control of rules? Furthermore, would you choose as a lyrical poet to be Bacchylides rather than Pindar? And in tragedy Ion of Chios rather than Sophocles? Bacchylides and Ion are, it is true, faultless and elegant writers in the polished manner. But Pindar and Sophocles seem at times in their impetuous career to burn up everything in their path, although their fire is often unaccountably quenched, and they lapse into a most miserable flatness. Yet would anyone in his senses put the whole series of Ion's works on the same footing as the single play of *Oedipus*?

CHAPTER 34

Hyperides and Demosthenes

If success in composition were not judged according to true standards, then Hyperides would be ranked altogether higher than Demosthenes. For he has more variety of tone than Demosthenes, and more numerous merits. In every branch of his art he is very nearly in the first flight, like the pentathlete; in each contest he is inferior to the champions among his rivals, but comes first among the amateurs.

Now Hyperides not only imitates all the virtues of Demosthenes except his talent in composition; he has also with uncommon success taken to his province the merits and graces of

1. Apollonius Rhodius (*fl.* 240 B.C.) was the foremost Alexandrian epic poet; his *Argonautica*, an epic in four books on the story of Jason and the Argonauts, is extant.

2. Eratosthenes, a versatile Alexandrian author and scholar of the third century B.C. The *Erigone* is an elegy based on the story of Icarius, his daughter Erigone, and his dog Maera.

Lysias. For he talks plainly, when this is required, and does not like Demosthenes make all his points in a monotonous series. He has, too, a gift for characterization, seasoned with charm and simplicity. Moreover, he has considerable wit, a most urbane raillery, true nobility of manner, a ready skill in exchanges of irony, a fund of jokes which, in the Attic manner, are neither tasteless nor ill-bred, but always to the point, a clever touch in satire, and plenty of comic force and pointed ridicule combined with a well-directed sense of fun – and all this invested with an inimitable elegance. He is very well endowed by nature with the power to awaken pity. He is a fluent story-teller, and with his easy flow of inspiration has an excellent faculty for winding his way through a digression, as of course he shows in his somewhat poetic handling of the story of Leto. And he has treated his Funeral Oration as, I think, no one else could have done it.

Demosthenes, on the other hand, is not good at describing character. He is not concise, nor has he any fluency nor any talent for delivering set orations. In general he partakes of none of the merits that have just been listed. When he is forced into attempting a joke or a witticism, he does not so much raise laughter at what he says as make himself the object of laughter, and when he wants to exert a little charm, he comes nowhere near doing so. If he had tried to write the little speeches on Phryne or Athenogenes, he would have made us think even more highly of Hyperides.[1] All the same, in my opinion the virtues of Hyperides, many as they may be, are wanting in the requisite grandeur; the productions of a sober-hearted fellow, they are staid and do not disturb the peace of mind of the audience – certainly no one who reads Hyperides is frightened by him. But when Demosthenes takes up the tale, he displays the virtues of great genius in their highest form: a sublime intensity, lifelike passions, copiousness, readiness, speed, where it is appropriate, and his own unapproachable power and vehemence. Having, I say, made himself master of all the riches of these mighty, heaven-sent gifts – for it would not be right to call them human – he invariably, by reason of the virtues he possesses, puts down all his rivals, and this even where

1. Hyperides's speech against Athenogenes was recovered last century; his defence of Phryne is lost.

the qualities he does not possess are concerned; it might be said, indeed, that he overpowers with his thunder and lightning the orators of every age. One could more easily outface a descending thunderbolt than meet unflinchingly his continual outbursts of passion.

CHAPTER 35

Plato and Lysias

In the case of Plato and Lysias there is, as I have said, a further point of difference. Lysias is much inferior to Plato in both the greatness and the number of his merits, and at the same time he surpasses him in his faults even more than he falls short of him in his virtues.

What then was in the mind of those godlike authors who, aiming at the highest flights of composition, showed no respect for detailed accuracy? Among many other things this – that nature has adjudged us men to be creatures of no mean or ignoble quality. Rather, as though inviting us to some great festival, she has brought us into life, into the whole vast universe, there to be spectators of all that she has created and the keenest aspirants for renown; and thus from the first she has implanted in our souls an unconquerable passion for all that is great and for all that is more divine than ourselves. For this reason the entire universe does not satisfy the contemplation and thought that lie within the scope of human endeavour; our ideas often go beyond the boundaries by which we are circumscribed, and if we look at life from all sides, observing how in everything that concerns us the extraordinary, the great, and the beautiful play the leading part, we shall soon realize the purpose of our creation.

This is why, by some sort of natural instinct, we admire, not, surely, the small streams, beautifully clear though they may be, and useful too, but the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine, and even more than these the Ocean. The little fire that we have kindled ourselves, clear and steady as its flame may be, does not strike us with as much awe as the heavenly fires, in spite of their often

being shrouded in darkness; nor do we think it a greater marvel than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw up from their depths rocks and even whole mountains, and at times pour out rivers of that pure Titanian fire. In all such circumstances, I would say only this, that men hold cheap what is useful and necessary, and always reserve their admiration for what is out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER 36

Sublimity and Literary Fame

Now with regard to authors of genius, whose grandeur always has some bearing on questions of utility and profit,[1] it must be observed at the outset that, while writers of this quality are far from being faultless, yet they all rise above the human level. All other attributes prove their possessors to be men, but sublimity carries one up to where one is close to the majestic mind of God. Freedom from error escapes censure, but the grand style excites admiration as well. It need scarcely be added that each of these outstanding authors time and again redeems all his failures by a single happy stroke of sublimity; and, most decisive of all, that if we were to pick out all the blunders of Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, and the greatest of all our other authors, and were to put them all together, it would be found that they amounted to a very small part, say rather an infinitesimal fraction, of the triumphs achieved by these demigods on every page. That is why the judgement of all ages, which envy itself cannot convict of perversity, has awarded them the palm of victory, guarding it as their inalienable right, and likely so to preserve it 'as long as rivers run and tall trees flourish'.[2]

As for the writer who maintains that the faulty Colossus is not superior to Polycleitus's spearman, one obvious retort, among many others, is to point out that meticulous accuracy

1. Which is not the case with all the grandeurs of nature named in the previous chapter.

2. Author unknown. Also quoted in a slightly different form as part of a longer quotation in Plato, *Phaedrus* 264 C.

is admired in art, grandeur in the works of nature, and that it is by nature that man is endowed with the power of speech. Moreover, in statues we look for the likeness of a man, whereas in literature, as I have said, we look for something transcending the human. However, to revert to the doctrine with which I began my commentary,[1] since freedom from faults is usually the result of art, and distinction of style, however unevenly sustained, is due to genius, it is right that art should everywhere be employed as a supplement to nature, for in cooperation the two may bring about perfection.

So much it has been necessary to say in order to resolve the problems before us. But everyone is welcome to his own taste.

CHAPTER 37

Comparisons and Similes

CLOSELY related to metaphors – for we must go back to them – are comparisons and similes, which differ only in this. . . .

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CHAPTER 38

Hyperboles

. . . and such hyperboles as, 'Unless you carry your brains trodden down in your heels'.[2] One must therefore know in each case where to draw the line, for sometimes if one overshoots the mark one spoils the effect of the hyperbole, and if such expressions are strained too far they fall flat, and sometimes produce the opposite effect to that which was intended. Isocrates, for example, unaccountably lapsed into childishness through the ambition which led to his fondness for exaggeration. The theme of his *Panegyric* is that Athens is superior to

1. See Chapter 2.
2. From a work at one time ascribed to Demosthenes, *De Halonneso* 45.

Sparta in the benefits that she has conferred on the Greeks, but at the very beginning he declares: 'Moreover, words have such power that they can make what is grand humble, and endow petty things with greatness; they can express old ideas in a new way, and discuss what has just happened in the style of long ago.'[1] 'Do you then by these means, Isocrates,' says someone, 'intend to interchange the roles of the Athenians and the Spartans?' For in his eulogy of the power of language he has all but made a prefatory announcement to his auditors that he himself is not to be trusted. Perhaps then, as I said earlier about rhetorical figures,[2] the best hyperboles are those which conceal the fact that they are hyperboles. And this happens when, under the influence of powerful emotion, they are used in connexion with some great circumstance, as is the case with Thucydides when he speaks of those who perished in Sicily. 'For the Syracusans,' he says, 'went down and began their slaughter, especially of those who were in the river. And the water was immediately polluted; but none the less it was drunk, thick though it was with mud and blood, and most of them still thought it was worth fighting for.'[3] That a drink of mud and blood should still be worth fighting for is made credible by the height of the emotions excited by the circumstances.

The same is true of Herodotus's account of those who fought at Thermopylae. 'In this place,' he says, 'as they were defending themselves with their daggers, such of them as still had daggers, and with their very hands and mouths, the barbarians buried them.'[4] Here you may ask what is meant by fighting against armed men 'with their very mouths', and being 'buried' with arrows. At the same time the expressions carry conviction, for the incident does not seem to be introduced for the sake of the hyperbole, but the hyperbole seems to take its rise quite plausibly from the incident. For as I keep on saying, actions and feelings which come close to sweeping us off our feet serve as an excuse and a lenitive for any kind of daring phraseology. This is why, even when they reach the point of being

1. Isocrates, *Panegyric* 8.
2. Chapter 17.
3. Thucydides, VII, 84.
4. Herodotus, VII, 255.

actually incredible, the shafts of comedy also seem plausible from their very laughability, as in

The field he had was smaller than a letter.[1]

For laughter, too, is an emotion, related as it is to pleasure.

Hyperboles may apply just as much to petty things as to great, an overstraining of the facts being the common element. In a sense satire is the exaggeration of pettiness.

CHAPTER 39

Composition, or Disposition of Material

THE fifth of the factors contributing to the sublime which I specified at the beginning remains to be dealt with, my friend, and that is the arrangement of the words in due order. On this matter I have already in two treatises given an adequate account of such conclusions as I could reach; for my present purpose I need only add the essential fact that men find in a harmonious arrangement of sounds, not only a natural medium of persuasion and pleasure, but also a marvellous instrument of grandeur and passion. For does not the flute instil certain emotions into those that hear it, seeming to carry them away and fill them with a divine frenzy? Does it not give rhythmic movement, and compel the hearer to conform to the melody and adapt his own movements to this rhythm, even if he is not in the least musical? Then the tones of the harp, in themselves meaningless, often cast a wonderful spell, as you know, by their variations in sound and the throbbing interplay and harmonious blending of the notes struck.

Yet these are mere semblances, spurious counterfeits of the art of persuasion, and not, as I have mentioned, a genuine expression of human nature. Now composition is a kind of harmony of the words which are implanted in man at his birth, and which affect not his hearing alone but his very soul, and it is my belief that it brings out manifold patterns of words, thoughts, deeds, beauty, and melody, all of them originally

1. Author unknown.

born and bred in us; moreover, by the blending of its myriad tones it brings into the hearts of the bystanders the actual emotion of the speaker, and always induces them to share it; and finally it builds up an accumulation of phrases into a grand and harmonious structure. Are we not to believe that by these means it casts a spell on us, and draws our thoughts towards what is majestic and dignified and sublime, and towards any other potentialities which it embraces, gaining a complete mastery over our minds? But it is madness to dispute on matters which are the subject of such general agreement, since experience is sufficient proof.

An idea which appears sublime, and which is certainly to be admired, is that which Demosthenes associates with his decree: 'This decree caused the peril which at that time encompassed the city to pass away just like a cloud.'[1] But its ring owes no less to the harmony than to the thought, for its delivery rests entirely on the dactylic rhythms, which are the noblest of rhythms and make for grandeur – which is why the heroic measure, the most beautiful of known measures, is composed of dactyls. And indeed, if you moved it wherever you liked away from its proper place,[2] and said, 'this decree, just like a cloud, caused the peril at that time to pass away', or if you cut out a single syllable and said, 'caused to pass away like a cloud', you would realize how far the harmony of sound chimes in with the sublimity. For 'just like a cloud' starts off with a long rhythm, consisting of four metrical beats, and if you remove a single syllable and write 'like a cloud', by this abbreviation you at once mutilate the effect of grandeur. And again, if you stretch the phrase out with 'caused to pass away just as if a cloud', the meaning is the same, but it no longer falls on the ear with the same effect because, by the drawing out of the final beats, the sheer sublimity of the passage is robbed of its solidity and of its tension.

1. *De Corona* 188.

2. The awkwardness here is due to corruption in the text, the loss perhaps of a phrase, perhaps of a preceding sentence, which would have indicated that 'it' refers to the last phrase of the decree, 'just like a cloud'. It is difficult to find English equivalents for most of the technicalities of this paragraph.

CHAPTER 40

The Structure of the Sentence

AMONG the chief agents in the formation of the grand style is the proper combination of the constituent members – as is true of the human body and its members. Of itself no single member, when dissociated from any other, has anything worthy of note about it, but when they are all mutually interconnected they make up a perfect whole. Similarly, when the elements of grandeur are separated from one another, they carry the sublimity along with them, dispersing it in every direction; but when they are combined into a single organism, and, moreover, enclosed within the bonds of harmony, they form a rounded whole, and their voice is loud and clear, and in the periods thus formed the grandeur receives contributions, as it were, from a variety of factors. I have, however, sufficiently demonstrated that many writers both of prose and verse who have no natural gift of sublimity, or even of grandeur, and who for the most part employ common and popular words which carry no extraordinary associations, have nevertheless, by merely combining and fitting these words together in the right order, achieved dignity and distinction and an appearance of grandeur – among many others Philistus,[1] for example, Aristophanes at times, and Euripides as a rule.

After the slaughter of his children Heracles says,

I am stowed to the hatches with woes, and there is no room for more.[2]

The expression is extremely vulgar, but it becomes sublime by reason of its aptness to its setting. If you fit the passage together in any other way, you will realize that Euripides is a poet rather by virtue of his power of composition than of his ideas. Writing of Dirce being dragged away by the bull, he says:

And wheresoever he chanced to wheel around, he seized and dragged along at once woman or rock or oak, now this, now that.[3]

1. A Sicilian historian of the fourth century.
2. Euripides, *Hercules Furens* 1245.
3. From the lost *Antiope* of Euripides.

This idea is excellent in itself, but gains further strength from the fact that the rhythm is not hurried or as it were carried along on rollers, but the words offer resistance to one another and derive support from the pauses, and take their stand in a firmly-based grandeur.

CHAPTER 41

Some Impediments to Sublimity

WHERE the sublime is concerned nothing has so debasing an effect as broken or agitated rhythms, such as pyrrhics (⏑ ⏑), trochees (– ⏑), and dichorees (– ⏑ – ⏑), which drop right down to the level of dance-music. For all over-rhythmical styles are at once felt to be cheap and affected; the monotonous jingle seems superficial, and does not penetrate our feelings – and the worst of it is that, just as choral lyrics distract the audience's attention from the action of the play and forcibly turn it to themselves, so also an over-rhythmical style does not communicate the feeling of the words, but only of the rhythm. And so there are times when the hearers foresee the likely endings and themselves break in on the speaker, and, as might happen in dancing, they anticipate the steps and finish too soon.

Equally wanting in grandeur are passages which are too close-packed, or cut up into tiny phrases and words with short syllables, giving the impression of being roughly and unevenly held together with pins.

CHAPTER 42

Conciseness

FURTHERMORE, excessive conciseness in expression reduces sublimity, for grandeur is marred when it is too closely compressed. You must take this to mean, not compression that is properly used, but what is entirely broken up into fragments and thus frittered away. For excessive conciseness curtails the

sense where brevity goes straight to the point. On the other hand, it is clear that prolixity is lifeless, since it entails an unseasonable length.

CHAPTER 43

Triviality of Expression, and Amplification

THE use of trivial words terribly disfigures passages in the grand style. For example, as far as content is concerned, the storm in Herodotus is marvellously described, but the description contains certain details which are, heaven knows, too far below the dignity of the subject. One might perhaps instance 'when the sea boiled', where the word 'boiled' is so cacophonous as to detract greatly from the sublimity. Then 'the wind,' he says, 'grew fagged'; and 'an unpleasant end' awaited those who were clinging to the wreck.[1] The phrase 'grew fagged' is uncouth, and lacks dignity, and 'unpleasant' is inappropriate to so great a disaster.

Similarly, when Theopompus had given a marvellous account of the Persian King's descent into Egypt, he spoiled the whole description by the use of some trivial words. 'For which city and which tribe of all those in Asia,' he says, 'did not send envoys to the King? And which of the products of the earth or of the beautiful or precious achievements of art was not brought to him as an offering? Were there not many costly coverlets and mantles, purple and white and multi-coloured, many pavilions of gold furnished with all things needful, many robes of state and costly couches? Further, there was silver and gold plate richly wrought, goblets and mixing-bowls, some of which you might have seen studded with jewels, others embellished in a cunning and costly fashion. In addition to these there were countless myriads of weapons, both Greek and barbarian, and beasts of burden beyond number, and sacrificial victims fattened for the slaughter; and many bushels of spices, and bags and sacks and sheets of papyrus and all other useful things; and such a store of preserved flesh from every kind of victim as to

1. Herodotus, VII, 188; VII, 191; VIII, 13.

form piles so large that anyone approaching them from a distance took them for mounds and hills confronting them.'

Here Theopompus runs from the sublime to the trivial where he ought, on the contrary, to have been heightening his effects. By mixing bags and spices and sacks with the wonderful report of the equipment as a whole, he has almost given the impression of a cook-shop. Suppose that among all those decorative objects, among the golden and jewelled mixing bowls, the silver plate, the pavilions of pure gold, and the goblets – suppose that someone had actually brought paltry bags and sacks and placed them in the midst of all these, his action would have produced an effect that offended the eye. Well, in the same way the untimely introduction of such words as these as it were disfigures and debases the description. He could have given a general account, as he speaks of the 'hills' of flesh being built up, and with regard to the rest of the provisions have spoken of wagons and camels and a host of baggage-animals laden with everything that ministers to the luxury and the pleasures of the table; or he could have called them piles of all kinds of grain and of all that conduces to fine cooking and good living; or if he had to put it so explicitly, he could have spoken of all the delicacies of caterers and good cooks.

In sublime passages we ought not to resort to sordid and contemptible terms unless constrained by some extreme necessity. We should use words that suit the dignity of the subject, and imitate nature, the artist who has fashioned man, for she has not placed in full view our private parts or the means by which our whole frame is purged, but as far as possible has concealed them, and, as Xenophon says,[1] has put their passages into the farthest background so as not to sully the beauty of the whole figure.

However, there is no urgent need to enumerate and classify the things that lead to triviality. For as I have previously indicated the qualities that furnish style with nobility and sublimity, it is obvious that their opposities will for the most part make it mean and ugly.

1. *Memorabilia* I, iv, 6.

CHAPTER 44

The Decay of Eloquence

HOWEVER, as in view of your love of learning I will not hesitate to add, my dear Terentianus, there remains to be cleared up a problem to which a certain philosopher has recently applied his wits. 'I wonder,' he said, 'as no doubt do many other people, why it is that in our age there are men well fitted for public life who are extremely persuasive, who are keen and shrewd, and especially well endowed with literary charm, and yet really sublime and transcendent natures are, with few exceptions, no longer produced. Such a great and world-wide dearth of literature attends our age! Are we,' he went on, 'are we to accept the well-worn view that democracy is the kindly nurse of great men, and that great men of letters may be said to have flourished only under democracy and perished with it? For freedom, they say, has the power to foster the imaginations of high-souled men and to inspire them with hope, and with it there spreads the keenness of mutual rivalry and an eager competition for the first place. Furthermore, by reason of the prizes which are open to all in republics, the intellectual gifts of orators are continually sharpened by practice and as it were kept bright by rubbing, and, as might be expected, these gifts, fostered in freedom, help to shed light on the affairs of state. Nowadays,' he continued, 'we seem to absorb from our childhood onwards the lessons of the slavery to which we are accustomed, all but swaddled in the infancy of our minds as we are in slavish customs and observances, and never tasting of the finest and most productive source of eloquence, by which I mean freedom; and thus we emerge as nothing but sublime flatterers.'

This, he maintained, was the reason why, although all other faculties may fall to the lot even of menials, no slave ever becomes an orator; for the fact that he has no freedom of speech, that he lives as it were a dungeoned life, and that he is always liable to be beaten, comes bubbling up to the surface. As Homer puts it, 'The day of our enslavement takes away half

our manhood.'[1] 'And so,' went on the philosopher, 'just as the cages in which they keep the Pygmies, or dwarfs, as they call them, not only stunt the growth of these who are imprisoned in them, if what I hear is true, but also shrink them by reason of the fetters fixed round their bodies, so all slavery, however just it may be, could well be described as a cage of the soul, a common prison-house.'

However, I took him up and said: 'It is easy, my good sir, and a characteristic of human nature, always to be finding fault with the present state of affairs. But consider whether it may be that it is not the peace of this world of ours that corrupts great natures, but much rather this endless war which holds our desires in its grasp, yes, and further still the passions that garrison our lives nowadays and utterly devastate them. For the love of money, that insatiable craving from which we all now suffer, and the love of pleasure make us their slaves, or rather, one might say, sink our lives (body and soul) into the depths, the love of money being a disease that makes us petty-minded, and the love of pleasure an utterly ignoble attribute.

'On further reflection, indeed, I do not see how, if we value the possession of unlimited wealth, or, to give the truth of the matter, make a god of it, we can avoid allowing the evils that naturally attend its entry into our souls. For vast and unlimited wealth is closely followed – step by step, as they say – by extravagance, and no sooner has the one opened the gates of cities and houses than the other comes in and joins it in setting up house there. With the passing of time, according to the philosophers, they build nests in our lives, and soon set about begetting offspring, giving birth to pretentiousness, vanity, and luxury – no bastards these, but very much their true-born issue. And if these children of wealth are allowed to reach maturity they soon breed in our hearts implacable masters, insolence and lawlessness and shamelessness. This will inevitably happen, and then men will no longer lift up their eyes nor take any further thought for their good name; the ruin of their lives will gradually be completed as their grandeur of soul withers and fades until it sinks into contempt, when they become lost in

1. *Odyssey* XVII, 332.

admiration of their mortal capabilities and neglect to develop the immortal.

'A man who has accepted a bribe for a verdict would never be a sound and unbiased judge of what is just and honourable, for a corrupt judge must necessarily regard his own private interests as honourable and just. And where bribery now governs all our lives, and we hunt others to death, and lay traps for legacies, and bargain our souls for gain from any and every source, having become slaves to [luxury], can we expect, in this pestilential ruin of our lives, that there should still remain an unbiased and incorruptible judge of works which possess grandeur or enduring life, and that he would not be overcome by his passion for gain? For such men as we are, indeed, it is perhaps better that we should be ruled than live in freedom. If we were given complete liberty, like released prisoners, our consuming greed for out neighbours' possessions might set the world on fire with our deeds of evil.'

In short, I maintained that what wears down the spirit of the present generation is the apathy in which, with few exceptions, we all pass our lives; for we do no work nor show any enterprise from any other motives than those of being praised or being able to enjoy our pleasures – never from an eager and honourable desire to serve our fellows.

'It is best to leave such things at a guess',[1] and to pass on to the next problem, that is, the emotions, about which I previously undertook to write in a separate treatise, for they seem to me to share a place in literature generally, and especially in the sublime . . .

(*The rest is lost*)

1. Euripides, *Electra* 379.